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ABSTRACT

Current approaches and programs toward teaching in the international education area tend to be casual and ambiguous. Two existing problems center on: 1) a lack of conceptual agreement and explicitness of meaning of terms by authors and teachers who in turn convey this vagueness to students; and 2) the lack of sustained concern with teaching technologies. How and what is taught in international studies courses needs to be a major concern. The International Studies Association (ISA) can assist faculty and institutions concerned with improving educational quality by designing international studies programs. The first of three suggestions is that the ISA could establish a consultation service offering help to departments wishing to reform and develop curriculum; to establish standards; and to serve as a professional accrediting service. Secondly the ISA could develop a series of in-service programs, regional workshops, and related activities to provide for the retraining of faculty. In addition to consultation services and institutes, the ISA could establish and publish a professional journal principally concerned with questions of international studies education. (SJM)

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THE PROSPECTS FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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THE PROSPECTS FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Having devoted considerable time to teaching international studies and to "assessing" the teaching component of tenure decisions, it seems clear to me that there is pressing need for much more systematic attention than is now paid to substantive teaching techniques as well as to methods for assessing and rewarding superior teaching. It is very clear that there is not terribly much agreement as to what constitutes international studies. We tend to cover for this lack of agreement by evasive ambiguity, conceptual vagueness and even, on occasion, by artfully contrived fuzziness. Unfortunately, this state of affairs must be reflected in the teaching of international studies. To teach well, we must have reasonably clear notions as to what we expect students to learn and how they can best learn what we teach.

Principally, the need for greater concern is demonstrated by the rather poor state of the field in terms of agreed-upon concepts of international studies. In a paper prepared for this conference, Fred Pearson demonstrates very well the lack of conceptual common ground that exists. The problem is more than a matter of agreeing upon definitions--it surfaces most often as a problem of authors and teachers not being explicit enough about what they mean by certain terms. Unless a teacher is clear as to his concepts and definitions, students are not likely to obtain a clear notion of those concepts and definitions. Concepts such as "power," "balance of power," "alliance," "negotiation," and the like, are not used in the same way by different people. And, all too often they are not used in the same way by the

same person either in his textbook, his articles and other writings or, indeed, his lectures. I submit that in the absence of some attempt at achieving some kind of consistency of usage, any hope of developing a cumulative body of knowledge in international studies is likely to be frustrated.

A second problem is presented by the lack of sustained concern with teaching technologies. All too often, we tend to repeat the techniques of our teachers. This problem is related to the first since were we more careful about how we taught international studies, we would likely be more careful about what we taught in international politics courses. We need programs designed to provide for the continuing education of college and university teachers of international studies. ISA could have a major impact if it were to undertake the kinds of programs suggested here. First, ISA should establish a consultation service, having within it a panel of consultants who shall be selected by ISA and "trained" by ISA to provide consulting services to universities and departments wishing to develop or improve upon new or existing programs in international studies. The panel of consultants should seek to establish minimum standards for introductory courses in various facets of international studies as well as standards for interdisciplinary "concentrations" in international studies. In addition, they could serve as a professional accrediting service for degree programs in international studies.

Achieving agreement among a panel of experts as to the content of the field much less the content of given courses would be no mean feat. But in the process of coming to grips with arriving at standards, the panel would have considered in a serious and professional way many of the kinds of conceptual problems alluded to here.

Second, there is need for establishing outlets for the exchange of information about teaching international studies. The International Studies Quarterly is not the most appropriate vehicle for such activities and it is far too overcommitted to take new tasks. Newsletters are somewhat useful although they are rather limited in terms of the kinds of information that can be exchanged meaningfully. My recommendation would be for ISA to begin quite seriously developing a series of in-service training programs, regional workshops, and related activities which would provide for the retraining of faculty now in the field in new techniques of teaching (and research) in international studies, and in new multi-media techniques for illustrating international processes. This is not a new idea, indeed a number of workshops have been planned for this conference to accomplish precisely these kinds of objectives. There has not been in the past and there is need for a series of regional one-week institutes which would investigate such questions as simulation and gaming techniques; aggregate data analysis techniques; multi-media techniques; and the use of remote access computer terminals for teaching international studies.

Third, in addition to such institutes, I think ISA should press for establishing a formal publication concerned principally, if not exclusively, with questions of international studies education.

This publication should be fully professional--that is, contributions to the piece should be carefully developed, there should be a board of editors, articles should be refereed and the standards for publication should be relatively high. As I conceive of it, such a journal should seek to achieve the kinds of objectives listed below. (Let me stress that the journal might well be an annual or semiannual publication rather than quarterly.) The types of articles and materials that I think should be included are:

(1) Articles that stress analyses of concepts that are particularly useful to teaching international studies.

(2) Articles that stress the utility and limitations of analogies and models in teaching international studies.

(3) Articles that explain in detail new simulations and games suitable for teaching international studies.

(4) Articles that stress the utility and limitations of multi-media techniques, complete with illustrative materials.

(5) Articles that stress the utility and limitations of aggregate data techniques for teaching international studies. (It would be important here to include computer programs that are useful for such activities.)

(6) Articles that stress the utility and limitations of interactive modelling via remote access computer terminals as teaching devices in international studies. (Again, the most complete kinds of documentation should be provided, including programs, etc.).

Such a vehicle as the suggested journal would provide an outlet for the publication of materials that are designed to relate directly to teaching. They would provide material which would reinforce good teaching and provide opportunity for improving the quality of teaching international studies.

Through this or some similar program, the International Studies Association could make a major contribution in being of assistance to faculty and institutions who are seriously concerned with improving the quality of international studies education. Failure to institute a systematic program for providing the kinds of things identified in this short presentation will simply tend to reinforce the casualness of our current preoccupation with international studies education.